

Study Committee on Adoption

Wednesday, November 19, 2014 10:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M.

Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room 2

Members present: Jane Bisbee, Chair; Michele Jackson, adoptive mother and adoption attorney; Gregg Ellis, Guardian ad Litem/Child Advocates, Marion County; Judge Dana Kenworthy, Grant Superior Court 2; Tamara Wilson, DCS Legal; Judge Steven Galvin, Monroe Juvenile Court; Sharon Pierce, Villages; Zachary Kester, adoptive father and adoption attorney; Karen Sauer, adoptive mother.

Guests present: Lindsey Craig, Parvonay Stover, Angel Owens.

Commission staff present: Lindsey Craig, Governor's Office Family Policy Director; Parvonay Stover, DCS Legislative Director.

- I. **Welcome:** Jane Bisbee greets audience. Reminds members and audience of Adoption Study Committee Website and email address. Email address is adoptionstudycommittee@gov.in.gov.
- II. **Approval of Minutes from October 1, 2014 Meeting:** Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve previous minutes. Motion made to approve minutes, passes committee vote, and meeting minutes of October 1, 2014 approved. Note: A few inaccuracies on minutes have now been corrected.
- III. **Approval of Interim Committee Report:** Jane Bisbee entertains motion to approve Interim Committee Report. Motion made to approve interim committee report. Passes committee vote and interim report approved. Jane asks Lindsey Craig what will happen once report is approved. Lindsey says it will be posted on ASC website and then sent to legislature. No further discussion.
- IV. **Possible Adoption License Plate: Update** – *Sharon Pierce, committee member*
Sharon gives background on consideration of a specialty license plate and whether or not it would promote adoption. There were two purposes:

- Continued adoption awareness
- Raising funds

Made aware that because of increasing numbers of specialty plates, this is not necessarily the “fund-raising vehicle” that it once was. Most likely DCS would have to provide oversight on that particular plate. Although there is awareness that would come from this, DCS probably would not be able to manage more than one specialty plate. Jane Bisbee feels it is the same population that might choose that plate as would be choosing the Kids First Trust Fund Plate. Need to consider that. No vote

today. Need to hear more before vote. When committee begins considering recommendations, it will be revisited.

V. Possible Adoption Advocacy Council: Update – Michele Jackson, committee member

Background on whether there should be permanent committee or council to bring awareness/advocacy to adoption. Is there already an existing organization that does this? Yes and no. Clearly DCS is main vehicle for protecting and supporting children within the foster care system. Do we want to be more expansive/inclusive of other types of adoptions, as well? Looked into the community for currently existing organization - Indiana Adoption Agencies United/Indiana Adoption and Child Services Organization (doing some things, but hard to know how they are composed.) Further looking within the existing structures of government, such as The Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana to see whether or not we could have a subcommittee or task force within that Commission. Another option is to have an independent organization. Need to figure out what their mission would be. Third option is not pursuing this at all.

- Sharon shares one thing they like about the Commission on Children is that it is so interdisciplinary. Wants an “intentionality” on focus of adoption. That might be a subcommittee around permanency. There might be dynamic strategies that would help achieve permanency for more children.
- How difficult would a stand-alone organization be? Question by Gregg Ellis. Michelle Jackson – depends on the direction that this committee gave to that. What would the goals be? Supporting existing programs might be more realistic. Depends on the focus you want and are they a support mechanism versus completely independent?
- Question by Zac Kester – Which would be the most viable? Needs to be discussed with the Commission first.
- Jane asks Lindsey/Parvonay to give guidelines on approaching the Committee. Lindsey indicates that Commission on Improving the Status of Children already has their agenda set. She will discuss with Justice Rush and other key players. Explains that during the last session the legislature was trying to reduce the number of commissions and committees. Does not think legislature will be receptive to creating another standalone committee. Can we informally have a committee of citizens, bringing these players together to form their own coalition/committee? Jane asks Michelle to assist in this process.

VI. Awareness Activities in the Juvenile Courts: Update – Judge Steven Galvin, committee member

Discusses Juvenile Justice Improvement Committee meeting and indicates that they are very receptive to having he and Judge Kenworthy present at the Juvenile Judges Conference in June. Need to remind judges to work with their DCS adoption champions

and to take part in their quarterly events. Judge Kenworthy talks about their upcoming adoption celebration. Supreme Court putting together a flicker gallery.

- Question by Michelle Jackson– What are hindrances when there is not participation by adoption friendly counties? Judge Galvin indicates they are busy actually getting adoptions completed.

VII. Vital Records Services for Adoptees and Families – *Brian Carnes, State Registrar, ISDH*

Explains administrative function Health serves with regard to adoptions.

- Handle records of adoption. Gets order from the courts. Change names of children. By law, ISDH must seal original birth certificate. Number one complaint they get at their office because people are trying to identify their birth information. Create new birth certificate for them and that stays on record along with the sealed certificate.
- Handle domestic and “foreign” adoptions (they call out-of-state-adoptions foreign also because they don’t “own” that original birth certificate)
- Matching programs-should a parent and child want to meet post adoption, they can reunite families.
- Medical history registry-if parent wants to leave medical history behind so child can access later.
- Putative father registry-for fathers who may want to assert their rights.

Zac Kester recommends Committee follow-up with regard to specific records questions. He will do research and send email to study committee.

VIII. Current Initiatives to Reduce Barriers – *Sandra Caesar, Department of Child Services*

Sandy gives background. DCS picks up after public has learned about DCS and foster care adoptions. However they came to find out about it, they are directed to the special needs adoption program specialist (SNAPS), who covers specific regions where families reside. SNAPS talk to people who are interested in adopting in general. If they decide that adoption from foster care is the best option, SNAPS serves as referral agent for that family for their training and home study process. Discusses foster care versus “adopt only”. Training is the same for either. Home study for families adopting from foster care is at no cost to the family. Detailed discussion on role of the SNAPS. DCS only has a role in the adoption of children who are in the state foster care system. DCS does not handle step-parent, private, or international adoptions.

On the back end, any adoptive family who resides in the State of Indiana can access post-adoption services. A SNAPS facilitates referral to the post-adoption specialists. Map w/SNAPS.

Reference: adoptachild.in.gov

Specific question and answer session.

Per Jane Bisbee, the topic of open adoptions should be further discussed by this committee.

IX. Psychological Challenges Faced by Older Youth – Shannon Branick, Children's Bureau

Director of Adoption services w/Children's Bureau. Discussion on post-adoption services. Services are available to every family who has adopted, regardless of what type. In order to access, families need to contact their SNAPS. Social workers work with families to:

- Provide case management services, such as linking families with resources, finding qualified therapists for adoption therapy, etc.
- Help advocate for families in the school system, such as sitting in on IEP meetings, etc.
- Provide crisis support
- Parent education
- Respite

General things they do for families:

- Connecting adoptive families with each other, support groups, (serve six regions right now, currently have twelve support groups within those regions)
- Book clubs
- Trainings for adoptive families
- Helping to provide more information on common issues for families, helping families reduce barriers to getting the services they need.
- Some flexible funding available that can help support those in some cases (i.e. equine therapy, special camps, etc.)

Hear these things from families:

- Wish they would have known about post-adoption services earlier. Doing the best they can to get the word out. Program has been in existence for a few years. Try to go to community events to advertise their services. Attend regional meetings with DCS. The lack of knowledge of post-adoption services is definitely a barrier. Families are fearful of the day that DCS "pulls out".
- Families wish they would have known more about the mental health disorders prior to adoption. Specific attachment issues.

- Families wish they had more info on impacts of trauma. Families are often surprised later on that child is having mental health issues due to trauma.

Other issues they see are pre-adoptive, challenges in older children, issues of attachment are playing out. They don't trust anyone. Resistant to adoption. Children afraid they will lose connections to biological families. Sometimes families who are considering adopting older children feel they are doing child disservice, making them unavailable to some of the services that would be available if they were not adopted (independent living/collaborative care).

Specific question and answer session.

X. Committee Discussion on Barriers to Adoption/Future Meeting Topics

- Collaborative care
- Education on Open Adoptions
- Legal Risk Children
- Background checks for Pre-Adoptive Parents
- Financial Aspects/Subsidy Information
- Timing
- Best Practices
- What type of families can adopt?
- Recruitment of Different Races and Ethnicities
- Faith Based Initiatives/Kansas

XI. Future Commission Meeting Dates:

- **January 14, 2015** **10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**
- **March 11, 2015** **10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.**

Location TBD